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ABSTRACT

The Austin Independent School District (AISD) requires that all graduates have skills in reading and mathematics equivalent to a ninth-grade level or above (based on scores on the Texas Assessment of Basic Skills). Of the 3,152 high school graduates in 1983-84, the percentage who met AISD's minimum competency requirement was 91 percent in reading, 93 percent in mathematics, and 90 percent in both reading and mathematics. A higher percentage of seniors has demonstrated competency every year since 1981-82, when the requirement went into effect. Tutorial courses are provided to help students attain competency levels, and at least one tutorial is required prior to signing a waiver letter stating that the student understands that competency standards have not been met. The tutorials are reasonably effective in helping students attain minimum competency levels. Of the 1983-84 graduates who took at least one tutorial, the percentage who met competency requirements prior to graduation was 77 percent in reading and 91 percent in mathematics. (BW)

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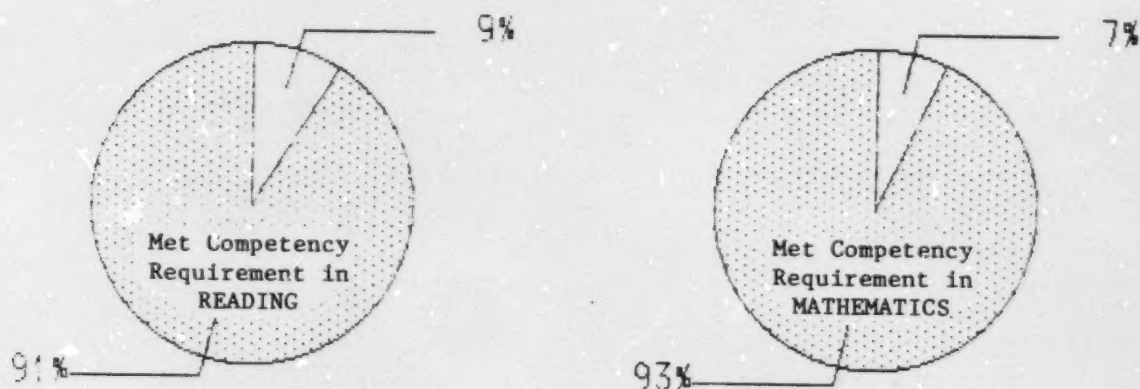
FINAL REPORT

HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION MINIMUM COMPETENCY REQUIREMENTS

The Austin Independent School District requires that all graduates have skills in reading and mathematics equivalent to a ninth-grade level or above. This report describes the impact of this requirement on students.

Major Positive Findings:

1. Of the 3,152 high school graduates in 1983-84, the percentage who met AISD's minimum competency requirement was ...
 - 91% in reading,
 - 93% in mathematics, and
 - 90% in both reading and mathematics.



2. The percentage of graduates meeting competency in both reading and mathematics was 1.5 percentage points higher in 1983-84 than in 1982-83.
3. The percentage of graduates signing reading letters was 1.4 percentage points less in 1983-84 than in 1982-83.

Major Findings Requiring Action:

1. Many graduates signed waiver letters without having taken a tutorial course. Of all students who signed a reading letter, 34% never took a reading tutorial. Of all students who signed a mathematics letter, 61% never took a mathematics tutorial. Many other students signed a letter of waiver after one tutorial rather than enrolling in additional tutorial courses.
2. The number of students meeting the minimum competency requirement in reading is less than in math. Through the 1983-84 school year, students were required to take fewer reading courses than math courses in high school.
3. Recent actions by the State Legislature may replace AISD's graduation requirements with statewide minimum competency standards.

WHAT ARE THE MINIMUM COMPETENCY REQUIREMENTS FOR GRADUATION?

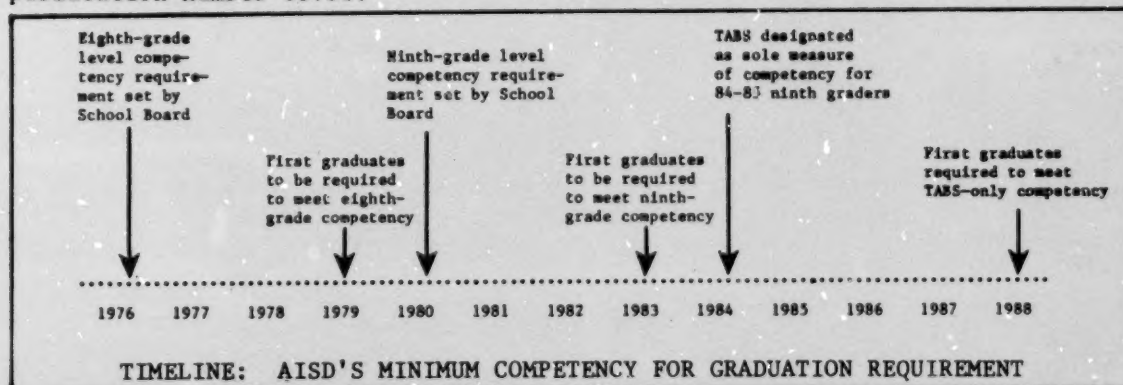
To graduate from an Austin ISD high school in 1983-84, a student must have demonstrated reading and mathematics competencies equivalent to average achievement at the beginning of ninth grade (9.0 grade equivalent). If this minimum competency level is not achieved, a letter of waiver which states that the student understands that competency standards have not been met must be signed. Tutorial courses in both reading and mathematics are provided to help students attain competency levels, and at least one tutorial is required prior to signing a waiver letter. Only special education students who cannot be validly tested are exempt from these requirements. Prior to 1982-83, the minimum competency criterion was the 8.5 grade equivalent.

The evaluation of the program includes administering tests, maintaining records, assessing procedures, and evaluating the impact of the minimum competency requirements.

A new School Board Policy, passed on May 14, 1984, changes the way students must meet minimum competency. The new policy specifies that students entering grade nine in the fall of 1984 and thereafter must meet minimum competency requirements by demonstrating mastery on the Texas Assessment of Basic Skills (TABS), administered in grades 9-12. The assumption is that the Texas Education Agency will raise the difficulty level for the TABS to the ninth-grade level beginning in 1986.

Prior to the passage of this new policy, eighth graders could meet competency on the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS). Students in grades 9-12 could meet competency on the Sequential Tests of Educational Progress (STEP) (given prior to 1983-84) or the Tests of Achievement and Proficiency (TAP) (given beginning in 1983-84), or on the TABS. Once each fall and once each spring, special administrations of Austin's Basic Educational Skills Test (Austin's BEST) have been conducted to determine which students must enroll in a tutorial course the next semester. Austin's BEST has also been administered during the final examination period in the tutorial courses.

Procedures for the testing and reporting are documented in the Policies and Procedures Manual: Minimum Competencies for High School Graduation, publication number 82.13. Details of the testing results and analyses are included in the Systemwide Evaluation: 1983-84 Technical Report (Volume II), publication number 83.31.



HOW MANY 1984 GRADUATES MET THE MINIMUM COMPETENCY REQUIREMENTS FOR GRADUATION?

- . Reading: 91% met competency requirements.
5% signed a letter of waiver.
4% could not be tested validly because of a handicapping condition (special education).
- . Mathematics: 93% met competency requirements.
3% signed a letter of waiver.
4% could not be tested validly because of a handicapping condition (special education).
- . 90% met competency requirements in both reading and mathematics.

Figure 1: COMPETENCY STATUS OF GRADUATES, 1980 to 1984

	1979-80		1980-81		1981-82		1982-83*		1983-84*	
Number of Graduates Who...	3397	100%	3322	100%	3233	100%	3408	100%	3152	100%
Met Min. Comp. Req. in BOTH Areas	3186	94%	3119	94%	2908	90%	3010	88%	2832	90%
Signed at Least ONE Letter	126	4%	122	4%	191	6%	254	8%	186	6%
Used at least ONE Sp. Ed. Exemption	85	3%	81	2%	134	4%	146	4%	135	4%
Met Min. Comp. Req. in Reading	3214	95%	3140	95%	2960	92%	3046	89%	2862	91%
Signed a Letter in Reading	102	3%	94	3%	148	5%	222	7%	162	5%
Used a Sp. Ed. Exemption in Reading	81	2%	80	2%	125	4%	140	4%	128	4%
Met Min. Comp. Req. in Mathematics	3249	96%	3177	96%	3018	93%	3162	93%	2941	93%
Signed a Letter in Mathematics	66	2%	67	2%	91	3%	105	3%	83	3%
Used a Sp. Ed. Exemption in Mathematics	82	2%	78	2%	124	4%	141	4%	128	4%
Met Min. Comp. Req. in at Least ONE Area	3277	96%	3206	97%	3070	95%	3196	94%	2971	94%
Signed a Letter in Both Areas	42	1%	39	1%	48	1%	73	2%	59	2%
Used a Sp. Ed. Exemption in Both Areas	78	2%	77	2%	115	4%	137	4%	121	4%

*1982-83 and 1983-84 graduates had to meet a 9.0 grade-equivalent criterion compared to 8.5 for prior years.

Note: Two 1982-83 graduates and one 1983-84 graduate were sp. ed. exempt in math only and signed a reading letter; consequently, the data may not add up exactly.

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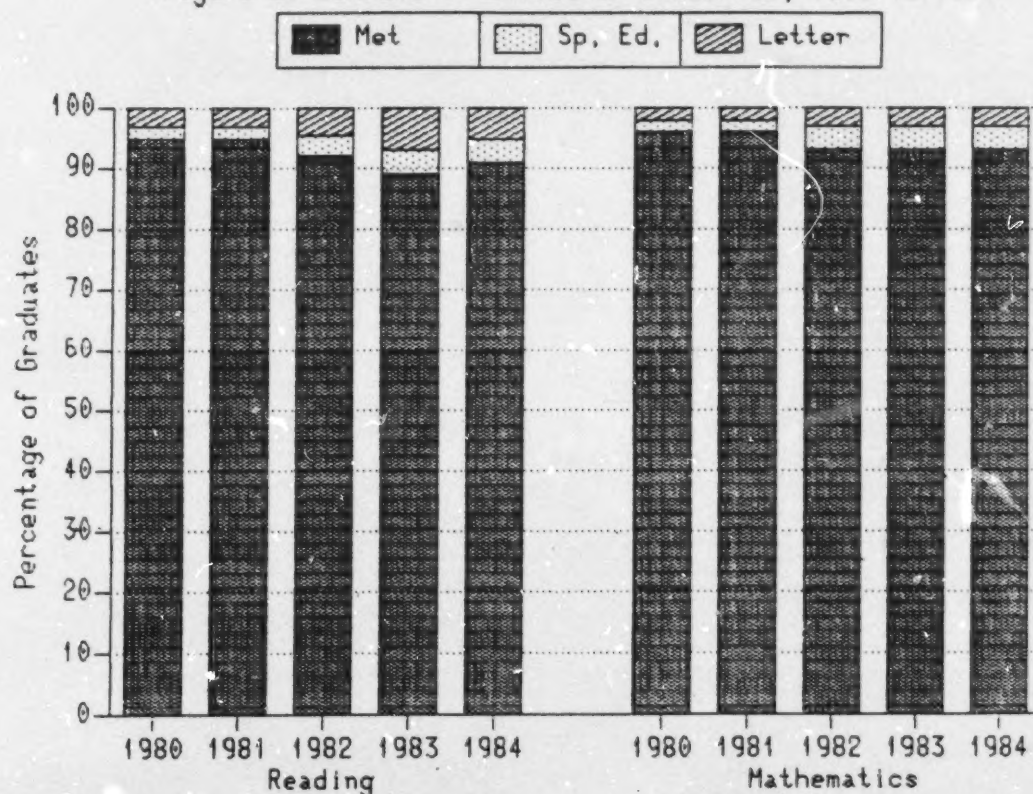
Of the 3,152 graduates during the 1983-84 school year, 2,832 (90%) met minimum competency requirements in both reading and mathematics. Those not meeting the requirements included special education students who were not testable (135, 4%) and students signing a letter of waiver (162, 5% in reading; 83, 3% in mathematics).

A lower percentage of graduates signed letters of waiver or used special education exemptions in 1983-84 than in 1982-83.

- 1.4 percentage points fewer students signed a reading letter of waiver.
- 0.5 percentage points fewer students signed a mathematics letter of waiver.
- 0.1 percentage points fewer students used a special education exemption.

Figure 1 compares this year's graduates with those from previous years. Figure 2 graphically presents the percentage of students meeting minimum competency requirements, signing letters of waiver, and using special education exemptions over the past five years. Figure 3 (pages 8 and 9 in this publication) presents graduate data by school for the past five years. Keep in mind that the 1982-83 and 1983-84 graduates had to meet the 9.0 rather than the 8.5 criterion.

Figure 2: COMPETENCY STATUS OF GRADUATES, 1980 TO 1984



HAVE THE MINIMUM COMPETENCY REQUIREMENTS HAD ANY EFFECT ON STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT?

- A higher percentage of seniors has demonstrated competency at or above the 8.5 grade equivalent every year since 1977-78 (before any competency requirements became effective).
- A higher percentage of seniors has demonstrated competency at or above the 9.0 grade equivalent every year since 1981-82 (the year before the 9.0 requirement became effective).

Test Results

If the minimum competency requirements have had an influence on student achievement, a decline in students in the lowest percentile ranges on the high school achievement test (the TAP beginning in 1983-84, the STEP prior to 1983-84) should be evident. Unfortunately, because the TAP and STEP are so dissimilar in many ways (i.e., norming procedures and norms available, tests administered), no meaningful comparison of data can be made for the last year. However, through 1983 when the test changed, there had been a small decline in the proportion of very low achievers in mathematics (as measured by the STEP) since the minimum competency requirements became effective. Low achievers in reading represented the same percentage of graduates in 1983 as they did in 1978.

Figure 4 shows that there has been an increase compared to 1978 (prior to any requirement) in the percentage of high school seniors who have demonstrated minimum competency skills at or above the 8.5 level prior to graduation. When the competency requirement was raised to 9.0, more students began meeting that higher standard (see Figure 5). More students appear to meet a higher criterion when it affects their graduation status.

Two factors seem to have influenced these noticeable increases.

- Marginal students retake the competency tests multiple times, thus increasing their chances of making higher scores.
- Tutorial courses offer instruction specific to the skills being measured by the competency tests.

As an outcome of this focused tutorial instruction, graduates do appear to have better mastery of a set of basic skills.

Figure 4: PERCENTAGE OF SENIORS MEETING THE 8.5 CRITERION, 1978 THROUGH 1984

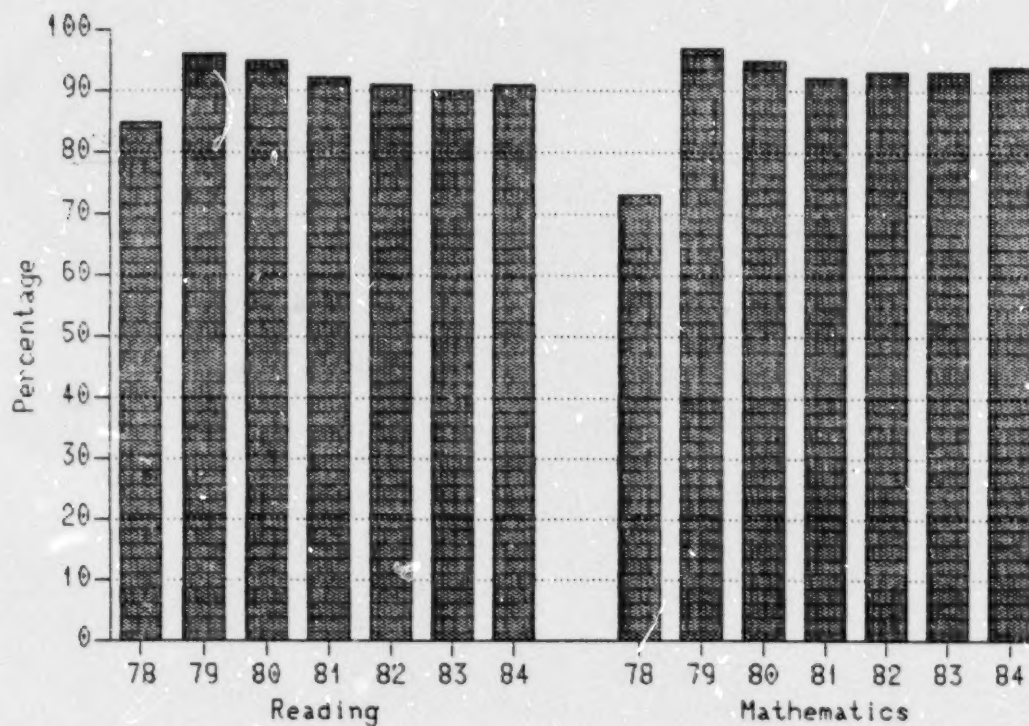
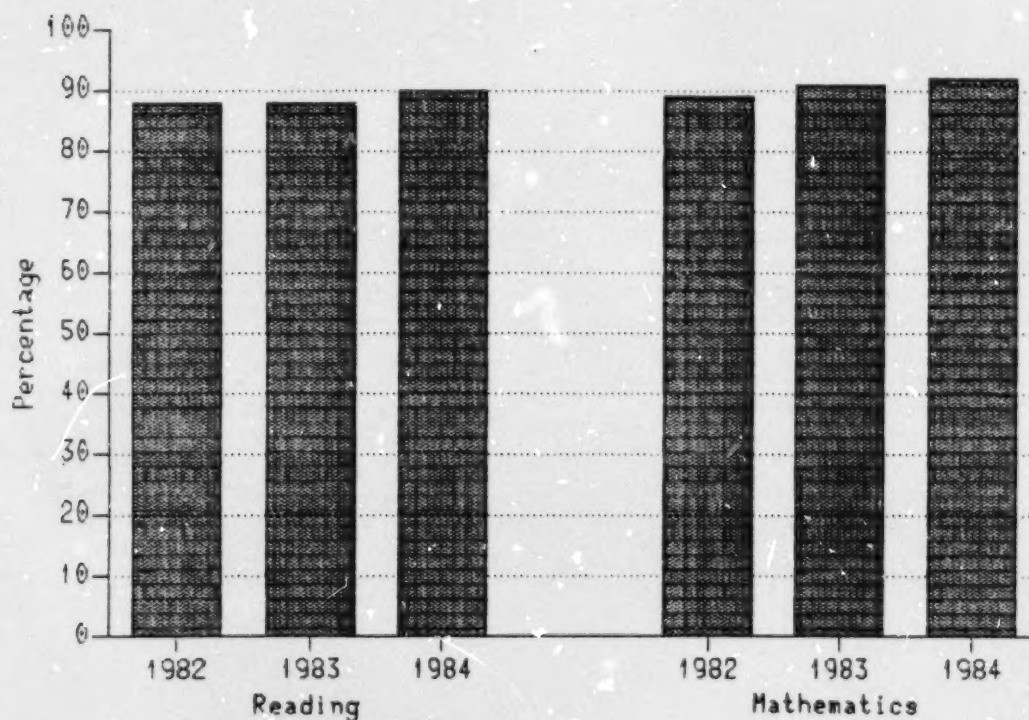


Figure 5: PERCENTAGE OF SENIORS MEETING THE 9.0 CRITERION, 1982 THROUGH 1984



WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF GRADUATES WHO SIGNED LETTERS OF WAIVER?

The 1983-84 graduates who signed letters of waiver had these characteristics.

1. Some signed waivers but never took a tutorial course.
 - 55 in reading (34% of all students signing a reading waiver)
 - 51 in mathematics (61% of all students signing a mathematics waiver)
2. Of the graduates who signed reading waivers, 41% had taken two or more reading tutorials. Of the graduates signing mathematics waivers, only 11% took more than one tutorial.
3. More are Black (43%). Fewer are Hispanic (29%) or Anglo/Other (28%).
4. Slightly more females than males signed waiver letters. Of the students signing waiver letters in reading, 51% are female. In mathematics, 52% are female.
5. There were 21 special education students whose ARD Committees believed could be validly tested, but who signed waiver letters because they did not meet competency requirements.
6. Only 2 LEP (limited-English proficient) students signed mathematics waivers, but 11 signed reading waivers.
7. Graduates who sign waivers average half a year older than other graduates.

	Year of Graduation	Total Number of Graduates	Graduates Meeting Both Reading and Math Competency		Graduates Meeting Reading Competency		Graduates Meeting Math Competency	
			#	%	#	%	#	%
ADULT LEARNING CENTER	79-80	10	10	100.0	10	100.0	10	100.0
	80-81	15	15	100.0	15	100.0	15	100.0
	81-82	23	23	100.0	23	100.0	23	100.0
	82-83	94	94	100.0	94	100.0	94	100.0
	83-84	78	78	100.0	78	100.0	78	100.0
ANDERSON	79-80	498	487	97.8	487	97.8	489	98.2
	80-81	398	375	94.2	377	94.7	384	96.5
	81-82	335	310	92.5	311	92.8	325	97.0
	82-83	334	299	89.5	301	90.1	314	94.0
	83-84	349	315	90.3	318	91.1	324	92.8
AUSTIN	79-80	397	392	98.7	393	99.0	393	99.0
	80-81	384	378	98.4	383	99.7	378	98.4
	81-82	345	331	95.9	333	96.5	335	97.1
	82-83	413	382	92.5	386	93.5	399	96.6
	83-84	303	280	92.4	282	93.1	288	95.0
CROCVATT	79-80	594	562	94.6	566	95.3	569	95.8
	80-81	526	507	96.4	509	96.8	510	97.0
	81-82	512	481	93.9	491	95.9	488	95.3
	82-83	538	492	91.4	496	92.2	508	94.4
	83-84	501	468	93.4	469	93.6	482	96.2
LBJ	79-80	345	315	91.3	319	92.5	326	94.5
	80-81	323	298	92.3	299	92.6	304	94.1
	81-82	294	264	89.8	269	91.5	276	93.9
	82-83	271	240	88.6	246	90.8	250	92.3
	83-84	285	264	92.6	269	94.4	267	93.7
JOHNSTON	79-80	155	139	89.7	142	91.6	143	92.3
	80-81	267	243	91.0	252	94.4	249	93.3
	81-82	315	280	88.9	290	92.1	290	92.1
	82-83	321	269	83.8	274	85.4	289	90.0
	83-84	326	287	88.0	290	89.0	298	91.4
LANIER	79-80	382	354	92.7	357	93.5	359	94.0
	80-81	341	320	93.8	324	95.0	323	94.7
	81-82	347	304	87.6	314	90.5	313	90.2
	82-83	358	309	86.3	313	87.4	326	91.1
	83-84	321	276	86.0	283	88.2	292	91.0
McCALLUM	79-80	332	310	93.4	312	94.0	323	97.3
	80-81	390	368	94.4	370	94.9	376	96.4
	81-82	319	288	90.3	291	91.2	295	92.5
	82-83	310	286	92.3	290	93.5	295	95.2
	83-84	286	258	90.2	259	90.6	271	94.8
REAGAN	79-80	333	302	90.7	308	92.5	315	94.6
	80-81	311	291	93.6	293	94.2	297	95.5
	81-82	329	283	86.0	287	87.2	304	92.4
	82-83	329	281	85.4	286	86.9	296	90.0
	83-84	295	243	82.4	245	83.1	260	88.1
ROBBINS	79-80	0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
	80-81	1	1	100.0	1	100.0	1	100.0
	81-82	17	11	64.7	15	88.2	11	64.7
	82-83	21	18	85.7	18	85.7	19	90.5
	83-84	33	24	72.7	27	81.8	27	81.8
SPECIAL SCHOOLS*	79-80	11	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
	80-81	11	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
	81-82	18	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
	82-83	17	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
	83-84	0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
TRAVIS	79-80	340	315	92.6	320	94.1	322	94.7
	80-81	355	323	91.0	325	91.5	340	95.8
	81-82	379	333	87.9	336	88.7	358	94.5
	82-83	402	340	84.6	342	85.1	372	92.5
	83-84	375	339	90.4	342	91.2	355	94.7
TOTAL	79-80	3397	3186	93.8	3214	94.6	3249	95.6
	80-81	3322	3119	93.9	3148	94.8	3177	95.6
	81-82	3233	2908	89.9	2960	91.6	3018	93.3
	82-83	3408	3010	88.3	3046	89.4	3162	92.8
	83-84	3152	2832	89.8	2862	90.8	2942	93.3

Figure 3. Graduates Meeting Reading and Mathematics Minimum Competency Requirements, By School, 1979-80 through 1983-84.

* Graduates of "Special Schools" such as Clifton Center and Mary Lee were reported independently prior to this year. Beginning in 1983-84, those graduates from special schools will be reported within regular high school populations.

NOTE: 1982-83 and 1983-84 graduates had to meet a 9.0 grade-equivalent criterion compared to 8.5 for prior years.

HOW SUCCESSFUL HAVE THE TUTORIAL COURSES BEEN IN HELPING STUDENTS ATTAIN MINIMUM COMPETENCY LEVELS?

- Of the 1983-84 graduates who took at least one tutorial course, the percentage who met competency requirements prior to graduation was...
 - 77% in reading and
 - 91% in mathematics.
- In 1983-84, the average percentage of students who met minimum competency requirements at the end of a tutorial course was...
 - 35% in reading and
 - 64% in mathematics.
- The percentage of 1983-84 graduates who took at least one tutorial course but failed to attain the minimum competency level was...
 - 23% in reading and
 - 9% in mathematics.

Semester Success Rates

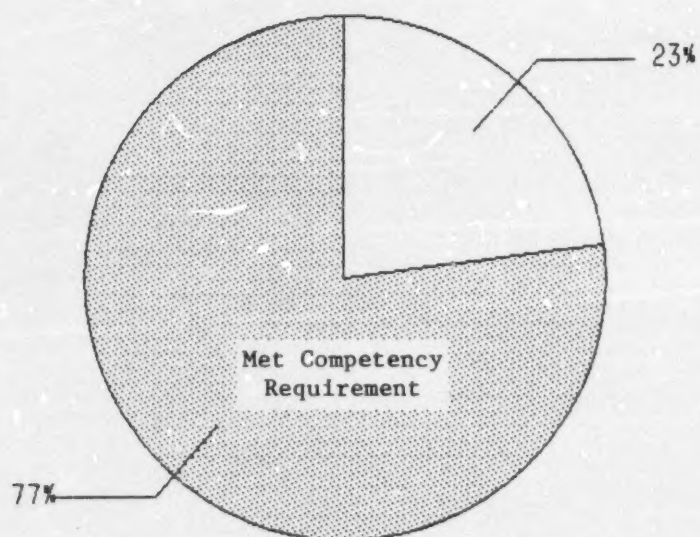
A competency test is administered at the end of each tutorial course. In addition, current high school students may demonstrate competency on the TABS or TAP during the spring semester. An estimate of the success of the tutorials can be obtained by inspecting the percentage of students who demonstrate mastery during the semester they are enrolled in a tutorial course. This success rate for the reading tutorial course was 37% in the fall and 33% in the spring of 1983-84. The success rates for mathematics tutorials were much higher--62% in the fall and 65% in the spring.

Overall Success

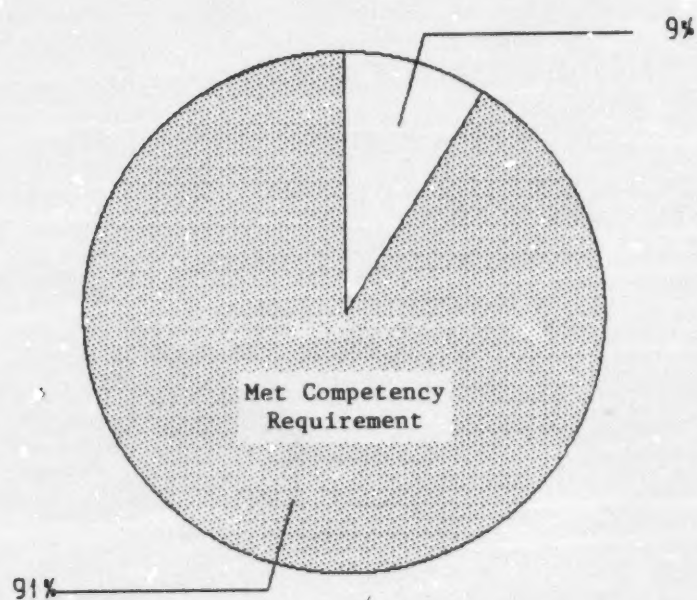
The ultimate goal of the tutorial courses is to bring every student up to (or above) the minimum competency level. Of the 1983-84 graduates, 11% took at least one tutorial prior to demonstrating competency in reading, and 9% in math. The tutorial courses have clearly played a role in the attainment of minimum competency levels by some graduates. However, even after taking at least one tutorial, some students never met the minimum competency requirements.

Overall, 77% of the 1983-84 graduates who took at least one reading tutorial met reading competency, as compared with 65% of the 1982-83 graduates. Of the 1983-84 graduates who took at least one mathematics tutorial, 91% met mathematics competency, as compared to 86% in 1982-83. Figure 5 illustrates the 1983-84 percentages.

Figure 6: PERCENTAGE OF 1983-84 GRADUATES TAKING AT LEAST ONE TUTORIAL WHO MET COMPETENCY REQUIREMENTS



Reading



Mathematics

WHAT CHANGES IN THE MINIMUM COMPETENCY PROGRAM WERE MADE IN 1983-84?

- An on-line computer file was set up by which high school registrars could report data on graduates.
- Improvements were made in the reporting and testing procedures.
- A procedure was outlined for testing and documenting graduates of the Adult Learning Center.
- A new School Board policy, passed on May 14, 1984, changed the way students must meet minimum competency.

Graduate File (On-line)

An on-line computer file, accessible by registrars at all high schools, was set up to provide the District for the first time with a centralized method of documenting information on graduates. This has resulted in increased accuracy of the data and a great savings of time at both the campus and administrative levels. Duplicate and sometimes triplicate reporting by schools of the same data to different District offices has been eliminated. Data from the Graduate File are used by the Superintendent's Office, the Department of Student Records and Reports, and the Division of Instruction, as well as by the Office of Research and Evaluation.

Improvements in Reporting and Testing Procedures

In past years, after administering a minimum competency special session testing, the testers scored the students' answer sheets by hand on campus, then reported the scores to campus personnel on the same day. A day or two later, the answer sheets were scored by machine at the central office in order to add the test data to the minimum competency computer file.

Beginning in 1983-84, the answer sheets are scored by machine only. This adds two days before the schools receive the scores, but this change eliminates the costly step of the testers scoring the answer sheets by hand and increases the accuracy of the data.

An answer sheet was developed specifically for Austin's BEST, replacing a stock answer sheet that could be confusing for a few students.

Graduates of the Adult Learning Center

ORE staff and representatives of the Adult Learning Center met and outlined procedures for certifying their graduates as meeting competency and for documenting graduates. Before entering the Adult Learning Center, each prospective student must make a score of a 9.0 grade equivalent or higher on the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE), administered by the staff of the Adult Learning Center. In May of each year, the Adult Learning Center will provide to ORE the names of the graduates for that year.

New School Board Policy

A School Board policy passed on May 14, 1984 changed the way students must meet competency. The new policy states that students entering grade nine in the fall of 1984 or thereafter must meet competency by demonstrating mastery on the TABS.

TABS Minimum Competency Criteria

The difficulty level of the 1984 TABS exit-level tests appears to have been slightly different than the past years' editions. Consequently, the raw score required (out of 44 items on each test) for meeting AISD's 9.0 competency criterion is 37 in mathematics and 39 in reading. Last year's TABS had 38 as the raw score required in mathematics and reading, while all 3 previous years' tests required a raw score of 37 to meet competency. Annually the Office of Research and Evaluation equates the TABS with the STEP or TAP to determine the 9.0 criterion because three fourths of the TABS items are new each year.

Confusion often occurs because the State's mastery level for the TABS requires a raw score much lower than that required by AISD. Beginning in 1986, the State mastery level is expected to be equivalent to the 9.0 criterion level used by AISD.

WHAT CHANGES NEED TO BE MADE IN 1984-85?

- The impact of the School Board policy passed on May 14, 1984, needs to be assessed and changes made in administrative procedures to implement the policy.
- The impact of the public education reform bill passed in June, 1984, needs to be assessed.

In coming years, the new policy will greatly affect some students and campus personnel (e.g., counselors, tutorial teachers) and decrease the amount of District resources needed to administer the Minimum Competency Program.

The new policy has already had a significant impact. Of the eighth graders who took the ITBS in 1984, 2,112 (47% of those tested) would have met competency requirements in reading, and 2,154 (48% of those tested) would have met competency requirements in mathematics. These students must now wait to meet competency requirements on the TABS.

The new policy will save the District a great deal of time and money in the future. For example:

- Less time will be spent by campus personnel (in coordinating minimum competency testing, keeping track of changes in students' competency status, etc.)
- Less time will be spent by ORE personnel to administer and monitor the competency program (administering the tests, maintaining the competency file throughout the year, etc.)
- No TAP/TABS equating study will be needed after 1985.

A negative effect of the new policy is that it may cause an increase in the number of waiver letters signed. In the past, many marginal students have retaken the competency tests multiple times, thereby increasing their chances of meeting competency. Now students will have a maximum of four opportunities to meet competency, so some of these marginal students will probably need to sign waiver letters.

In future years, two types of waiver letters probably will be necessary for students:

- Who took the TABS, but never met minimum competency criteria.
- Who could not meet minimum competency criteria because they never took the TABS.

State legislative action in June, 1984 mandates a statewide minimum competency measure for graduates in 1986-87 and thereafter. The new law does allow local districts to require additional competency measures, but the logistics of operating a dual system may be impractical. Consideration must be given to adopting the new State minimum competency requirement as the sole standard in AISD.

Bibliography

Related Publications

HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION MINIMUM COMPETENCY REQUIREMENTS: 1983-84 evaluation plan. Austin, Tx.: Office of Research and Evaluation (Pub. No. 83.09), Austin Independent School District, October 1982.

The evaluation plan is a one-year plan of evaluation work for this project. It provides a brief project and evaluation summary, and identifies the decision and evaluation questions to be addressed, other information needs, and information sources to be used.

Matter, M. Kevin and Ligon, Glynn D., Issues in Developing a Local Minimum Competency Test: Our BEST Effort. Austin, Tx.: Office of Research and Evaluation (Pub. No. 83.44), Austin Independent School District, April 1984.

This publication, a paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association in April, 1984, describes the history of AISD's minimum competency program and the process by which AISD developed Austin's Basic Educational Skills Test, used for Minimum Competency testing.

POLICY AND PROCEDURES MANUAL: Minimum competencies for high school graduation. Austin, Tx.: Office of Research and Evaluation (Pub. No. 82.13), Austin Independent School District, October, 1982.

This manual is intended to be a complete resource for information pertaining to AISD's minimum competency requirements for high school graduation. It contains the policy and procedures relating to the requirements for graduation, the conduct of the minimum competency testing, and the required reports and record keeping. The manual is revised and updated as necessary to reflect changes in the requirements or the procedures.

SYSTEMWIDE EVALUATION: 1983-84 technical report. Austin, Tx.: Office of Research and Evaluation (Pub. No. 83.31), Austin Independent School District, June 1984.

The Technical Report is a detailed account of the instruments used in data collection, and the purposes, procedures, and results of the data collection effort. It is contained in three volumes. The information presented in Volume I relates to the District's Five-Year Plan for Accreditation, which emphasizes improving student achievement in basic skills, with a special focus on low-SES and minority student achievement. In Volume II, information is presented about the District's special student populations including retainees, school leavers, National Merit scholars, and limited-English proficient (LEP) students. Volume III contains survey results and summaries of District records.

AUSTIN INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT
OFFICE OF RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

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